

Melor Sturna

1984 and "1984"

Where and How Have George Orwell's
Forecasts Come True?



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**1984 и «1984». ПРЕДСКАЗАНИЯ ДЖОРДЖА ОРУЭЛЛА:
ГДЕ И КАК ОНИ СБЫЛИСЬ?**

на английском языке

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“The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized... To keep your face expressionless was not difficult, and even your breathing could be controlled, with an

effort: but you could not control the beating of your heart, and the telescreen was quite delicate enough to pick it up."

Though an inanimate object, the telescreen is one of the main characters in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the novel by British author George Orwell. Published in 1949, it gained immense popularity in the West, making 1984, a date chosen at random, a landmark year in history—a "terminal date" in the eyes of countless political commentators, sociologists, futurologists and journalists who wrote about it. The title of the novel became a notion familiar even to those who had never read it and the phrase "Big Brother is watching you" became proverbial.

A renegade from socialism who turned from a fellow-traveller of progress into a scout for reaction, George Orwell conceived his social and political novel as a satire of socialist society exemplified by a Labour Party Britain that had "degenerated" into a "Communist" one. But history has played—and could not help playing—a malicious joke on both the author and his apologists. Every year from 1949 to 1984 has ever more clearly and convincingly shown that without himself wishing it or being aware of it (though the latter point could be disputed) George Orwell drew not a caricature of socialism and communism but a perfectly realistic picture of modern capitalism and imperialism. What exercised George Orwell's highly developed imagination has become a reality in the

Western world, above all, in the United States of America, a real and not an imaginary "focus of evil" in our time.

A curious—and significant!—coincidence: a shortened version of the excerpt from the novel quoted above was set as the epigraph to a book recently published in the United States, *The Puzzle Palace*, by James Bamford. It is a book about the National Security Agency (NSA). To the general public in the United States, and especially outside it, the NSA is much less known than the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) or Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), though it certainly does not deserve to be. In technical resources, assets and size of staff it surpasses all other similar US services combined and is indisputably top contender for the title of "Big Brother".

Speaking of the NSA, former Senator Frank Church warned: "That capability at any time could be turned around on the American people who would not have any privacy left, such as the capability to monitor everything... There would be no place to hide." He said that "the technological capacity that the intelligence community has given the government could enable it to impose total tyranny." Yes, that is precisely the way things are going: 1984 is already here and Orwell's telescreen, which seemed fantasy in 1949, is an antediluvian monster compared with the latest achievements of what Bamford calls "technotyranny". Ramsey Clark, former US

Attorney-General, has said that the "audio-visual intrusion" capability could soon "create a society where no one will know whether his every act is watched, his every word heard...." In other words, a real degeneration of society and its transformation into the world of Orwell's fantasy.

While other American official bodies measure the computer capacity they have at their disposal in square feet, the NSA measures it in acres. Nowhere else in the United States will you find such a concentration of up-to-date computers as in the basement of the National Security Agency headquarters. The volume of operations may be gauged from the mere fact that forty tons of secret documents have to be destroyed every day! These electronic sleuths, linked with the computers of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other "Big Brothers", can and do keep watch over literally every American, they know literally everything about everybody. There is nowhere to hide, there is no escape from Uncle Sam's telescreen, one that really exists today. It snoops on your telephone calls, opens your mail, spies on your movements and, especially, on your thoughts.

This "technotyranny" in itself already wipes out the famous Fourth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which proclaims: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and sei-

zures, shall not be violated." Shall not? Yet this promise is made to the citizens of a country whose government, according to *Parade* magazine, has compiled 6,723 kinds of files on them, containing 3,900 million individual entries, or approximately 18 for every man, woman and child!

' In his novel Orwell wrote of the telescreen and its masters that "with all their cleverness they had never mastered the secret of finding out what another human being was thinking." On this point he has obviously proved a false prophet, not "up to the mark". It is not so much a question of the technical aspect of the matter—the "lie detectors", computers that distinguish voices, psychological tests and "truth drugs" of every kind, the hundreds of millions of finger-prints and the all-pervading files. When all is said and done this is "technotyranny", the same old police baton brought up to date. The most important thing is not the technical aspect of the matter, but its social and political scale, the tyranny not of robots but of employers, the introduction of thought control in the course of which thinking beings are reduced to unthinking producers and consumers.

In the society Orwell depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the "proles" (from the word "proletariat") are the lowest of all. In the rulers' eyes the "proles" were "natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals... Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neigh-

bours, films, football, beer, and, above all, gambling, filled up the horizon of their minds... There was a vast amount of criminality in London, a whole world-within-a-world of thieves, bandits, prostitutes, drug-peddlers, and racketeers of every description."

"Proles and Animals Are Free"

The picture is a familiar one, not just from London. But this is not the ideal of socialism, it is the everyday life of capitalism. To reduce "proles" to the status of animals is the aim of capitalism. It can achieve this only by ridding man of what distinguishes him from animals, by robbing him of the ability to think. Capitalism is impelled to do this by the law of self-preservation, the law of survival. As Orwell himself says: "Until they become conscious they will never rebel."

"Technotyranny" is an important form of the oppression of "proles", but not the sole one. They must also be corrupted, and that is precisely the task with which "the violent society" is engaged. Lastly, they must be deceived. It is no accident that one of the slogans of the rulers of Orwell's utopia is: "Proles and animals are free."

If one were to put everything being written in the West about freedom and democracy in a heap one would have a bigger heap of ideological rubbish than all the computer refuse of the National Security Agency.

Though not so frank and cynical as Orwell's slogan, all these writings essentially pursue one and the same aim. Freedom for the select few is secured by the bestial condition of the majority, but for the majority itself such a condition is declared to be freedom. "Bourgeois democracy... always remains, and under capitalism is bound to remain, restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and deception for the exploited, for the poor," said Lenin.

Such are the premises which inescapably and inevitably lead capitalism to an Orwellian society. Though setting out to slander socialism, the author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in fact drew a fuller literary portrait of what already lay in an embryonic state in capitalism. Let us take the United States as an example, a classic one. Proclaimed more than two centuries ago, the Constitution of the United States begins with the words: "We, the people..." But these were not "proles". The 55 members of the Convention which adopted the US Constitution were the slave-owning owners of plantations, big landowners, bankers and businessmen.

There are no "proles" today in the US Congress. Not for nothing is one of its chambers, the Senate, called a "millionaires' club" and people in America often tell you: "It's the best Congress money can buy." Those who buy themselves such presents naturally have heaps of money no smaller than the heap of refuse from the NSA computers. The late Sen-

ator Boies Penrose used to say he believed in the "division of labour"—businessmen sent Senators to Congress to pass laws enabling them to make more money, some of which they paid into election campaign funds to send Senators back to Congress to pass more laws enabling them to make even more money. This is not something from Orwell's satirical utopia. Penrose is not a character in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He really was a member of the US Senate. By the way, the leap year of 1984 will see new elections in the United States. It is already clear that they will be the most expensive elections in American history.

"Proles and animals are free..." One cannot help recalling the rather crude joke about a lady who refused to marry a gorilla only because he didn't have any money. Like every renegade from socialism, Orwell desperately tried to dismantle the cause-and-effect link between the rule of money and the exercise of democratic freedoms. But as a writer of—it must be acknowledged—quite outstanding talent, in actual fact he established those links.

The "Power of Facing Unpleasant Facts"

It is no accident that the new conservatives, as rewrought Leftists and liberals of every hue—from ultra-red to pale pink—now

like to call themselves, cannot bring themselves to forgive Orwell, in all other respects their standard-bearer, for the fact that, while "granting" freedom to capitalism, he let socialism "keep" equality, if only in the economic field. Thus one of the pillars of the new conservatives in America, Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary*, after quoting Orwell's remark that capitalism was "probably doomed" because it "leads to dole queues, the scramble for markets and war", adds with obvious regret and even displeasure: "Nothing has been more difficult for intellectuals in this century than giving up on socialism, and it is possible that even Orwell, who so prided himself on his 'power of facing unpleasant facts', would have been unwilling or unable" to do so.

This is not the place to consider in detail how much that was socialist "survived" in Orwell. (He died in 1950 at the age of forty-six). I cite Podhoretz' comment only because, first, it contains an acknowledgement of the gigantic influence of socialist ideas on the intellectual elite in the West, and, second, it shows Orwell's "weak points". (I would not be in the least surprised if the "lie detector" or telescreen of "Big Brother", or rather of Uncle Sam, were to rate Orwell's ideological behaviour as "unsatisfactory", despite his pathological anticommunism.

The "power of facing unpleasant facts" is precisely the source of what is at first sight the paradoxical metamorphosis *Nineteen*

Eighty-Four is undergoing. Orwell's lampoon on the world of socialism is becoming a "documentary portrait" of capitalism.

The most striking instance of this is the United States of the "imperial presidency" of Ronald Reagan. The return to the primitively crude brazenness of capitalism, the shameless dismantling of what meagre social legislation existed, the glittering of gold and the seam-splitting of old clothes are now less frequently masked by a screen of lies. As Ronald Reagan has himself said, although in a rather different connection: "When you start trying to mix salt and sugar, it is not going to turn out to be either good salt or good sugar." In the world of capital the "dolce vita" of the few is paid for by the majority of society being turned away with empty stomachs from the feast of "general prosperity".

The year 1984 has only just begun, it is still a virgin year and has not yet had time to be overgrown with the sins of statistics. But here are some figures from previous years. Just 350 industrial monopolies, comprising a mere 0.002 per cent of all the companies in the capitalist world, laid their hands on about 70 per cent of all assets and profits and had two-thirds of the entire labour force, or "proles", according to Orwell, toiling for them. In the United States itself a very tiny proportion—0.3 per cent—of the population possessed 22 per cent of the country's wealth, while 60 per cent of the coun-

try's citizens had only 7.5 per cent of its wealth.

Behind these figures is a total robbery of the people, no less total than the spying upon them. Behind these figures stand tens of millions of jobless and homeless, hungry and freezing "proles", balancing on the brink of destitution and toppling into the abyss, shorn of all and every freedom, because "history confirms that when a citizen loses his economic freedom, he ultimately loses his political freedom as well". The man who drew that conclusion was not a socialist and not even Orwell, but chairman of the board of directors of one of the biggest banks in the United States, the First National City Bank, Walter Wriston, the man who took over from David Rockefeller himself the title of "Mr. Establishment", in other words, a person whom even Norman Podhoretz, even the telescreen could not suspect of being a "subversive dissident".

As for "general prosperity" under capitalism one could quote the unpretentious song that haunted the luckless characters in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

It was only an 'opeless fancy,
It passed like an Ipril dye,
But a look an' a word an' the dreams they stirred!
They 'ave stolen my 'eart awye!

The dreams for the majority are an instrument of deceit practised by the minority.

When the thick syrup of social demagoguery dries up it turns out that the sugar and salt

still remain at different poles. Undissolved and, moreover, unmixed.

“War Is Peace”

George Orwell enriched the English language with a new word “Newspeak”. What is Newspeak? By way of an answer let me give some examples from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. On the face of the building where the main character in the novel works three slogans are hung:

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

In Orwell’s utopia the Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war, the Ministry of Love with torture, while the spreading of lies, as you have already guessed, of course, is the concern of the Ministry of Truth. Newspeak is a form of the philosophy of doublethink, denying external reality and holding that “the heresy of heresies was common sense”. A key word in Newspeak is “blackwhite”, which has two mutually contradictory meanings. It means “the habit of impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the plain facts”.

Now here is another quotation. Not from Orwell’s novel but from the report of the special commission set up to organize the celebrations of the bicentenary of the United States: “...for all our wealth and power,

something has gone awry... We desire peace, yet find ourselves at war. We believe in justice and equality, yet there are wrongs and injustices in the land. We proclaim reverence for our God-given environment, yet tolerate its pollution. We believe in the brotherhood of man, yet there is violence in the streets..."

It is hard to imagine a more explicit acknowledgment of the policy of doublethink, covered with a fig leaf!

Almost a year ago, in a radio speech on the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, President Reagan said: "I was told once that if you stand to one side of his statue at the Lincoln Memorial, you can see the profile of a man of strength and wisdom, and by standing on the other side, the profile of a man of compassion. Well, I did that, and it's true. He taught us the true meaning of 'We, the people...' He made us understand that no man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent. And he lived by his words 'I am not bound to win, but am bound to be true'."

This is yet another classic example of Newspeak. Unlike Lincoln the present rulers of the United States are not two-faced but double-faced. One half of their face wears the "We, the people..." mask. The exposed other half boasts: "We, the monopolies... We, the military-industrial complex..." With one side of their mouth they mumble about human rights, with the other they shout: "Go

at him!" They impose their dictate not only on separate individuals without asking their consent but on whole states too. The invasion of Grenada and intervention in Lebanon, the deployment of new missiles in Western Europe are recent instances of this. They dream of world domination, dream not of honesty but of winning a nuclear missile war. If we were to compress the philosophy of these Januses of imperialism into aphorisms, we would end up with those same Orwellian slogans:

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

I am not in the least exaggerating. Not in substance and not even in form. The motto of the US strategic air force is "Peace is our profession" and Washington's subversive radio stations call themselves Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe.

Now as regards ignorance. When one of the leaders of Orwell's utopia is told that the earth's rocks "are full of the bones of extinct animals—mammoths and mastodons and enormous reptiles", he objects: "Have you ever seen those bones...? Of course not. Nineteenth-century biologists invented them." How can one help recalling the "monkey trials" in the United States! Not only in the 1920s but in the late 1970s too. How can one help recalling President Reagan's refusal to believe in dinosaurs because their existence contradicts the Bible story of Creation?! Here

is further evidence that Orwell hit not those he was aiming at but others. His own side.

On one and the same day in August 1983 two events of note took place in the United States. In Washington by the very same Lincoln Memorial Reagan referred to a huge rally was held to mark the 20th anniversary of Martin Luther King's march on the capital demanding equal rights for Blacks. In Seattle the American Legion, a reactionary militarist organisation, held a convention. The President, who was on holiday, decided to interrupt it to make a speech to can you guess whom? You don't have to be particularly good at guessing here. As James Reston remarked in the *New York Times*, the President felt much more at home with old soldiers—and, may I add, with modern weapons. Yes, Reagan flew to Seattle, forgetting about Lincoln, the two sides of his face, his understanding of the words "We, the people..." and his motto in life. Yet it was not only coloured Americans who gathered by the Lincoln Memorial on that day, but people from all sections of the nation demanding not war but peace, not slavery but freedom, not ignorance but education.

"God Is Power"

The speech, or rather the Newspeak, delivered by the President to the American Legion in Seattle might have been written to

Orwell's dictation. Here are just a few passages directly and vitally relevant to urgent problems of today. Addressing the Legionaries, the President said: "At your Boston Convention in 1980 I pledged to strive for arms reduction agreements... We've kept that pledge." Did the President really think the whole world was too deafened by the explosions of past wars to hear him? Of course not. He was just resorting to Newspeak. His "zero option", "interim" and other proposals are were-wolf-proposals, like NATO's "double track" decision prompted by a philosophy of aggression and the arms race. Glancing at the ghost of Orwell prompting him, the President said:

"There is no contradiction in this dual approach... The restoration of a credible deterrent and the search for real arms reductions and stability are two sides of the same coin—a coin that is inscribed with the words, peace and security. (Remember the motto of the US strategic air force?—*M.S.*) Our efforts are designed to sustain peace, plain and simple. We do not seek an arms race: indeed, we seek to reverse the trends that cause it..."

What could sound finer?

In Washington Newspeak the failure of the Geneva talks is their success. Such is the logic of doublethink. Not for nothing is the arms race declared to be "real arms reductions". Not for nothing is such a policy being pursued under slogans lifted straight from Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. I refer

to the talk of "building-down" armaments. This is pure Orwell!

But the prize example of Newspeak, its culmination, was yet to come, when Reagan declared:

"Peace is a beautiful word, but it is also freely used—sometimes even abused. As I have said before, peace is an objective, not a policy. Those who fail to understand this do so at their peril. Neville Chamberlain thought of peace as a vague policy in the thirties, and the result brought us closer to World War Two. Today's so-called 'peace movement'—for all its modern hype and theatrics—makes the same old mistake."

Then came the climax:

"My heart is with those who march for peace. I'd be at the head of the parade if I thought it would really serve the cause of peace. But the members of the real peace movement—the real peacemakers—are people like you. You understand that peace must be built on strength."

So the American Legion is the real peace movement and the fighters for peace are just a bunch of Chamberlains. No, it is not the peoples of the world who are abusing the beautiful word "peace", but you, Mr. President, who abuse it with your far from beautiful Newspeak, standing all notions on their heads and passing off black as white and vice versa!

...A few years ago when I was seeing the Washington headquarters of the FBI just as

a visitor, thank heavens, I saw a huge poster depicting a Soviet soldier in a threatening pose, wearing a giant fur hat and with his sub-machine gun at a tilt. The poster was intended to scare people. In the years I was working in the United States I saw plenty of such scarifying pictures in the newspapers, in films and on television. I came across something of the same sort in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "A new poster had suddenly appeared all over London. It had no caption, and represented simply the monstrous figure of a Eurasian soldier, three or four metres high, striding forward with expressionless Mongolian face and enormous boots, a sub-machine gun pointed from his hip. . . The thing had been plastered on every blank space on every wall. . ."

I do not know whose idea this repulsive figure originally was: whether the FBI got it from reading Orwell or the latter saw it at the FBI. But the purpose of both posters—the FBI's and Orwell's—is to foster hate. In the utopian world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the fostering of hate is elevated to the rank of both a science and an art. Sessions of what is called "Two Minutes Hate" are held in offices every day. The telescreens show "endless columns of the Eurasian army", the sight of which turns hate and frenzy into "a hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledge-hammer". This is what happens at the two-minute sessions. But there

are also "Hate Weeks". One cannot help recalling the unholy row raised in the West over the provocative espionage flight by the South Korean Boeing-747 airliner. That was not even a "Hate Week". As leading Soviet journalist Stanislav Kondrashov said, it was a "month of hate".

In the real world of imperialism—a world worse than Orwell's—two-minute, week-long and month-long sessions of hate merge into a solid, continuous flood of anti-Sovietism and anti-communism. This torrent of filth pours from TV screens and floods the air, poisoning people's minds and the international atmosphere. Who controls it? Who directs it? Those very forces over to whose side Orwell ran like a coward, forsaking the barricades of Republican Spain.

He flattered his new masters and threw mud at his old friends. But, to paraphrase a well-known line by Mayakovsky, one might say that the art of literature is a "fiendishly tricky" thing. It indeed played a wicked trick on Orwell. The "rotten future" of socialism which he meant to describe turned out to be the repulsive reality of capitalism. In the field of foreign policy too, on the cardinal issues of war and peace. It could not have been otherwise.

"We are the priests of power. . . God is power," says one of the rulers of Orwell's utopia. "Always—do not forget this. . .—always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing

subtler... If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever... An endless pressing, pressing, pressing upon the nerve of power..."

"Controlled Insanity"

No, this is not a portrait of the future, it is the fury of the past. Among those who could well put their bloody signatures to the words quoted above are Pinochet, the hangman of the Chilean people, the leaders of the "death squads" in El Salvador, the butchers of the people of Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon, the Pretoria racists, Duvalier, the Haiti dictator, and Paraguay's Stroessner—all the dictator puppets of imperialism—those who joy in the "hour of hate". Whose hour has struck or will strike.

Lastly, there is the vilest, most wicked and far-reaching crime of imperialism—its preparations for a thermonuclear holocaust. This is not even "controlled insanity", as Orwell put it, but uncontrolled insanity, like the hydrogen reaction threatening the world with a real and not a Biblical Armageddon. Orwell predicted this insanity but erred in his choice of those who would become insane. It was an article of faith for the rulers of his utopia that "conquest" was to be achieved "either by gradually acquiring more and more territory and so building up an overwhelming preponderance of power, or by the discovery of some

new and unanswerable weapon". These insane rulers had two aims—"to conquer the whole surface of the earth and to extinguish once and for all the possibility of independent thought". The first aim was to be achieved by military force, the second by police batons. And the telescreen.

In Orwell's utopia we find an "economy existing by and for continuous warfare". It is a familiar picture. Again not on this side but on the other side of the frontiers of socialism. "In the vast laboratories of the Ministry of Peace, and in the experimental stations hidden in the Brazilian forests, or in the Australian desert, or on lost islands of the Antarctic, the teams of experts are indefatigably at work," wrote Orwell. "Some are concerned simply with planning the logistics of future wars; others devise larger and larger rocket bombs... Others search for new and deadlier gases, or for soluble poisons... Others strive to produce a vehicle that shall bore its way under the soil like a submarine under the water... Others explore even remoter possibilities such as focusing the sun's rays through lenses suspended thousands of kilometres away in space..."

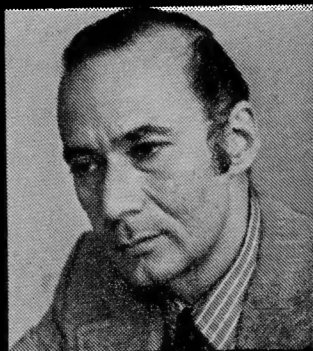
As we can see, this is a fairly precise description of the Pentagon's current and future plans—both for this year of 1984 and for the five-year arms programme with its two-trillion dollar budget and "Star Wars" proclaimed by Reagan.

A characteristic detail: on the very day he

signed the draft of the military budget for an Orwellian 1984, President Reagan declared in a Voice of America broadcast that he was "for peace". This was not the voice of America. It was the Newspeak of US imperialism.

...For some time past Orwell has had an extremely energetic rival and imitator. In the spirit of Orwell's Newspeak it has devised its own "speak" and called it "Ada". The Pentagon has adopted as standard computer language that of Ada, the brainchild of researchers at New York University's Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences.

"My tongue is my undoing..." The Pentagon's tongue is the undoing of world peace. The language of Ada is that of the fires of a thermonuclear Hades. Shakespeare's Caliban rebuked the nobles who had taught him language because he now knew "how to curse". In the language of Ada one can hear a curse upon the human race. But just as Orwell with his Newspeak could not predict the future of mankind, so the Pentagon with its Ada will not be able to wipe it out.



Melor STURUA (b. 1928), Soviet writer and journalist specializing in international affairs, has been on the staff of the government newspaper *Izvestia* for over thirty years. He has been to many countries in the West and East as special correspondent and has written books about West Germany, Britain, the United States and other countries.

From 1977 to 1983 he was *Izvestia* correspondent in the United States. He is a winner of the Wacław Worowski and Alexei Tolstoy prizes.

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